2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
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Upper Egypt

CHAPTER VII

DEATH AND FUNERARY CEREMONIES

WHEN a male or female Muslim is dying it is the custom to give him or her some water to drink. So far, despite careful inquiries, I have discovered no definite belief associated with the practice; all that I have been told is that it is a custom that must always be observed. It may originally, perhaps, have been a purificatory or vivificatory rite. In certain parts of Egypt it is the custom for some of the people sitting or standing near a person who is *in extremis* to squeeze his or her body with their hands, in order to force the soul out of it. Men do this for a man and women for a woman. When death has actually taken place the eyes and mouth of the deceased are closed, and the legs drawn down straight and laid close together. The body is then washed, the water for this purpose being obtained, if possible, from a mosque or from some sacred well or pool connected with a sheikh. In Upper Egypt the corpse may be washed by a *fikīh*, who takes as payment all the clothes of the deceased, and also the remains of the soap used in the washing.

As Egypt is a very hot country burial takes place very shortly after death. For instance, if a death has occurred in the morning or early afternoon the funeral takes place the same day. On the other hand, if death resulted from some injury due to accident or an act of violence burial is not permitted till the Government doctor and police officials have made full investigations.

If some one is dying in the village the news soon spreads, and friends and relations flock in crowds to the house. The moment the breath is out of the body female relatives and a number of professional mourners begin to shriek and scream (Fig. 50). Many of them leave the house of death and perambulate the village seven times, uttering the while piercing cries, and waving handkerchiefs, usually black, blue, or green in colour, as they go along. This perambulation of wailing women is not, anyhow at the present day, consciously associated with any idea of driving the spirit or

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
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lot of water will come from the eye, and then it will be found that all the inflammation has disappeared.

The Arabs have a custom of attempting to cure sores, headaches, and other complaints by branding with red-hot nails. A man came to me on one occasion with a terrible skin disease on his hands and wrists. An Arab had burnt him in several places across both wrists, and these burns, having become septic, had, of course, made him much worse. I dressed his hands every day till I left the village, by which time he was much better.

A similar remedy is sometimes employed for fever or for nervous disorder. A fire of cow-dung (the ordinary household fuel) is lit, and some iron nails are placed in it till they are red-hot. The patient then squats on the ground with his arms tightly folded in front, and a man holds him securely in this attitude. Another man removes a nail from the fire, and with it burns one or two places on the back of the patient's neck. The nervous trouble supposed to be cured by this means is that caused by seeing an apparition in the fields at night or by some other alarming manifestation. One is inclined to speculate on the state of the patient's nerves *after* undergoing this exceedingly painful treatment!

The following is a cure for a broken bone. Some gum is obtained from an acacia-tree, and, after being pounded and passed through a fine sieve, is mixed with water. This mixture is spread on a piece of thick brown paper, which is then placed immediately over the injured part of the body. It is left in this position for a week, when it is removed, for by that time it is believed that the broken bone will have united again.

When visiting the market on market-day at one village I saw a man seated a short distance from the crowds of buyers and sellers. On approaching him I found that children suffering from very sore and inflamed eyes were being brought to him by their mothers. On examining the eyes of a child he remarked, "Yes, he has got them," and told the mother, who was sitting on the ground in front of him, to hold the child face-downward. He then placed one hand on the back of the child's head, and with the other he gently rubbed its eyes (Fig. 126). Almost immediately numbers of tiny grubs fell from them on to the ground, where I saw them wriggling about. He did this with each child in turn, usually with the same result. I have seen him remove grubs from the eyes of children on more than one occasion, and I have never been able

functions of grocer and druggist, café-keeper and innkeeper, money-lender and banker. He is the most Egyptianised of Europeans. He has no objection to living right in the village, among the fellaheen if not with them, and on them if not for them. He has brought into this closed world the gramophone and the games of the West. He robs the fellaheen and teaches them the use of narcotics, but he is unfailingly obliging. Though his rates are exorbitant, he will lend money on request without asking too many questions. He sells on credit, and when he buys he pays cash. The fellaheen appreciate his resourcefulness and enterprise.

Other less important but more popular figures stand out from the mass by virtue of some well-defined social functions long sanctified by custom.

First comes the *mizayen* or barber-surgeon. He is a very busy man. He shaves all the fellaheen of his district once a month, and crops their hair. Squatting in front of his client, who also squats, he takes a dish of water between his knees, and an old razor between finger and thumb, and quickly tidies up the face and head. An aching tooth? He will pull it out. Cupping, scarification, purge? No difficulty at all. He is responsible for public health, and therefore performs vaccinations, and notifies deaths to the *'omda*. The *mizayen* also officiates at circumcisions, and on the eve of this operation, or of a wedding, the hair-cutting takes on something of a ritual significance. He surrounds it with ceremony, and in so doing dignifies his art. For his varied services he is paid either in kind at harvest time or in milliemes.

The magician or sorcerer, with his charms, his formulae, his perfumed sachets and his magic remedies, would be a serious rival to the *mizayen*, were it not that his credulous customers are chiefly women. He may live in the village or merely pass through. It is to him that the country women have recourse in order to get the help of jinns, to cast spells, to counteract the evil eye or to ensure conception. No-one can make them believe that this holy man is just a rascal and an impostor. The more magic babble he puts into his rites, the more confidence they place in him. Indeed there are many instances in which trickery is not a sufficient explanation for the effects produced. A whole book might be written on witchcraft in the village, and its affinity

4:Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 (ca. 1890) MR13 Fellahin MR13 Libyan Bedouin MT9

for the space of forty days. The true reason for this the ancients did not know (or if they knew it, they did not speak about it, or it did not reach us). But the erudite Pasteur says that in this space is the crisis in which the invalid is between the two states of recovery and danger.

XXXVI

THE ZĀR

(We do not know the true etymology of the word Zār, whether from Zārā, a town in the North of Īrān; or from Zār, an Arab village East of Yemāma. Most take it from *Ziyāra* [visitation], meaning thereby the coming of the "Masters"[1] into the presence.)

Fortune did not grant us to be eye-witnesses of the ceremony of the Zār so that we might speak of it at first hand, since the Kūdīyāt[2] object to the presence of men or even boys, so we relate this on the authority of the famous authoress [p. 73] Zainab Efendī Fawwāz. It was published in No. 200 of the valuable *Nile Journal* (*Jarīdat-al-Nīl*).[3] She says:

"There is a company of women called Kūdīyāt. They are those who practice the Zār. Such women are the most undesirable and most wicked of charlatans, for they are female quacks. They do things which souls loathe, and at which bodies shudder. As for the women who agree with them they almost worship them on account of the powers to which they lay claim. They even go so far as to believe that if any woman speak in her own home, the *Kūdīya* will hear in her own dwelling. The reason for this is, that the *Shaikh* or the *'Afrīt* [or demon] who possesses the *Kūdīya*, transmits the words to his devotee. For this reason the woman cannot speak, nor if

[1] [i.e. the presiding women who are "possessed" by male spirits. Tr.]
[2] [The chief women of the party (*jā'ifa*) of the Zār, or rulers of its meetings (*aqwād*, plural of *qā'da*).]
[3] [See M. Hartmann: *op. cit.*, *index*.]

it was taken up by a society in Europe. But the truth is clear that those who thus imitated the "old wives" of Egypt were only seeking after some new and wonderful thing so that people might make a fuss about them. They were denounced by the scientific world of Europe, until they desisted from their error.

XXXVII

"THORN OF THE WIND" SHŌKAT-AL-RĪḤ

THIS is a name used generally in the villages for decay (caries) of the bones of the phalanges of the foot or hand, and the accompaniment of this decay with violent inflammation and great swelling. Many people in Buḥaira (Province) have become famous for "curing" it, the best known of them being the Shaikh 'Abd al-Ḥamid. He has two "treatments" for this, one, old, namely, that the finger of the patient should be burnt with a circular cauterization; the other, new, namely, that the sinews of the muscles should be cut and rooted out along with a part of the substance of the fingers. It is asserted that this latter "method" makes a more radical cure than the former because it is in agreement with modern science. The harm is not confined, however, to the cutting and rooting out of the sinews, but his recommendation to the patient not to wash his wound with water [p. 80] saying that water is "the poison of wounds."

Some people employ a poultice of doves' dung, as I saw last year, for a youth presented himself to me during my stay in the provinces, and on examination I found the nail-phalanx necrotic. So I extracted it and he was well after a few days, though he had remained for sixty days before having it out, enduring in it all kinds of torment.

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"cure" all, namely, to segregate them for forty-one days in a room darkened and tightly locked, without feeding them during their stay there except with thin bread and molasses (lit. black honey). This woman comes to visit them every morning only, and performs on them the "cure" by a wonderful system. If any of them experiences a violent pain she makes for her a ring or two for her temple or her neck, or else she cauterizes her with iron rings in the foregoing places.

Women come to her to be "treated" for complete "adhesive" obscurations, or retinal inflammation, or atrophy of the visual nerve, or any other of the grievous diseases all of which the woman (quack) characterizes by the name of "blindness." She begins by administering to them a drop of the juice of an onion for one week. In the second week she makes for them a collyrium of ginger (of equal parts of sugar-candy and ginger). [p. 13.] In the remaining three weeks she drops in their eyes a drop composed of dew which has fallen overnight upon the leaves of the Persian cane (or bamboo), mixed with the powder of burnt bones of crows.

In the Gharbiya province, in a village called *Kafr Khidr*, about a quarter of an hour distant from *Ṭanṭā*, there is a man who lays claim to a medicine for the eyes. He has harmed thousands of God's creatures, because his "method" is quicker in damaging than the previous one. He is prone to make surgical operations on all who seek him out, whatever the disease may be. One of my medical friends told me (as follows): I visited the man one day when he had just begun to perform an operation. He split the cornea with a broad knife, and all the moistures of the eye flowed out, and in a word, there were cast out with them the iris and the internal covers. The man, however, did not become confused, but bound up the eye of the patient, and said to him, "Now you will go home and sleep upon your back without moving in the least or speaking a word during three days. If you do not do that then I am not responsible for your eye, if anything happens to it." My friend said, I was sorry for this poor fellow, but I checked myself, and said that it was not necessary to grieve for the loss of sight when Allah has blinded insight.

4: Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 (ca. 1890) MR13 Fellahin MR13

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silk, coloured red, and named the Alexandrian shirt (*al-ḳamīṣ al-Iskandirānī*). (In reality it is made at Edkū[1] and its neighbourhood.)

It has some alleviating effect on skin trouble, for on account of the softness and smoothness of the shirt the skin is less irritated. But the danger, really, is that in the village there is to be found only one shirt set apart for this purpose. Hence it becomes a means of infection and the transmission of this danger. If each ailing child had a new shirt brought to him it would be favourable for a cure, a cure harmless and often beneficial.

IX

"THE BLUE WATER" AND CAUTERIZING THE HEAD

164

HEADACHE (*ṣudā'*)[2] either "moving" or "smiting," is very common [p. 21] in the provinces. Most of the cases we witnessed were among those whose eyes turn backwards and forwards on the occurrence of attacks of glaucoma, the pains arising from "the blue water."[3] They "cure" that ailment, that is, the "moving" variety, by cauterizing the head generally. It is like the other pitiless "cures" whose purpose the quacks know is to create a new and more painful counter-agent by which the patient forgets, or pretends to forget, his original ailment for some days, on account of his pre-occupation with the intensity of his new pain. But that only lasts some days until the pain of the original ailment, whose cause was not rectified, becomes overpowering now that it is away from the influence of the quacks.

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I knew of a man in the village of Maḥalla Diyāya in the Province of Gharbīya, who repelled the intensity of the pain of this ailment by means of cauterizing the temple. This is an

[1] [A village in the Delta 28½ miles east of Alexandria. Tr.]
[2] [See note, p. 54.]
[3] [The colloquial name in Egypt for glaucoma. Tr.]

4:Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 (ca. 1890) MR13 Fellahin MR13

752 old " method " which is only of advantage to its practitioner, who lives comfortably in the shadow of its effect on the minds of simpletons.

X

THE " CURE " FOR ULCERS

164 THE " old wife " prescribes for the patients who are suffering from chronic ulcers (*nawāṣīr*) having fetid purulent secretions, 759 the following " prescription " : Mix one part of snuff (or tobacco dust) with one part of natron (its usual name [p. 22] is *aṭrūn*, and it is sesquicarbonate of soda). Pour on them two parts of very pure olive-oil and boil the whole for a while. Then anoint the tube of the ulcer (*nāṣūr*) and it will be cured.

Some excellent people have attested to me that it is a " cure " that has been proved by actual observation to be advantageous. It may be that time will show the truth of this experiment and beneficial remedy. But it is well known to-day that there is no cure for ulcers except scraping them with special instruments, or erasing the ulcerous tube, thus removing the cause, and sewing up the new wound. Sometimes cautery with a heated probe, or an electric cauterizer is employed.

Explanation of the " prescription." The snuff is a cauterizer, and on its entering the wounds it awakens their vitality, which has been weakened by the passage of time, and it changes the nature of the vile secretions for the better. Then fleshy pieces grow up filling the cavity of the ulcerous tube. (But that only results on the supposition that an ulcer is found continuing after the removal of its cause, such as ulcers resulting from a bullet which has entered a muscle deeply, and remains for some time with the surrounding part suppurating. Then it is extracted and the road leading to its original lodging-place has the appearance of [p. 23] an ulcerous tube. But appearances are not evidence).

4: Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 MR13 Fellahin MR13
(ca. 1890)

respiration he spits out the water from his mouth forcibly and comes down without mishap. In most cases, however, giddiness overcomes the person, and he falls in a faint and does not get up for some time. [p. 40.]

The true treatment. Since this ailment is nought but bloodlessness, which prolongs many a long illness, its cure is comprised in taking healthy precautions such as (after the removal of the cause) the taking of iron compounds.

XXIII

THE "SEVERED" HEART

WHEN any sick person complains of weakness in his strength and withering in his body after severe fevers or very depressing illnesses the "old wives" of the village diagnose his illness as "the severing of the heart." (قطع قلب).

The true explanation. To this they attribute causes which are weaker than a spider's web, such as that the patient had in the time of his health carried something heavy for example, and they assert that the cords of the heart have been cut by this means. I know that Farag Abū Maḥmūd of the village of Munāghela in the Province of Buḥaira (he is the eczema doctor, see Part I, p. 77) cauterizes those afflicted by this ailment, burning deeply all along the vertebral canal. Often he increases his kindness and beneficence towards the patient by burning him in the navel two or three times.

XXIV

THE "SPLITTING" OF THE EYE

EVERY day we see hundreds of *fellāḥīn* complaining of intermittent ophthalmia, especially at the beginning of the summer

164 season. The "old wives" "prescribe" for them the white of
228 eggs mixed with spirit of tutty, or *tūtiyā khalīlī* (oxide of zinc
458 and cadmium and their sulphates). As a result the eye will be "cured" with marvellous rapidity.

The true explanation. The "old wives" pretend that this tutty has a hidden power in attracting the redness of the eye and sucking it up completely. The truth of the matter is that the majority of the eyes which they diagnose as "split" are affected with chronic granular ophthalmia. They are affected by sharp twinges caused by congestion. [p. 42.] Indeed the spirit of tutty does influence temporarily, and that is on account of its arresting the inflamed vessels whereby the eye becomes clear. But it lasts only for a little, until the malady returns with greater force.

The true treatment. There are special remedies for it, and certain operations. Let the patient, however, in these circumstances consult eye-specialists on account of the danger of this serious malady.

XXV

ḤASAN AGḤĀ IN DAMANHŪR

759 Ḥasan Agḥā, above-mentioned, is famous for the "cure" of stone, and extracting it from the urinary bladder. His reputation is widespread, and patients resort to him from all quarters. (And not only those suffering from stone but from any illness in the bladder of uncertain symptoms.) He has an agency in Damanhūr which he has made like a hospital for his
752 numerous patients. His method is to begin by bringing a large plate full of hot water, in which he seats the patient for a little. Then he inserts two fingers of his left hand inside the man's rectum and slips between them a knife with which he wounds the patient's vitals. The blood flows in torrents. Sometimes the patient faints when he sees the blood; sometimes he screams asking for relief. Then our clever quack

4: Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 (ca. 1890) MR13 Fellahin MR13

(Ḥasan Aghā) seizes this opportunity and smears a pebble (which he had previously prepared [p. 43] with the help of hospital servants or surgical attendants) with the blood of the patient. After certain exertions and the display of a little effort (to complete the deception) he hands over to the patient the stone moist with blood. This is the method of Ḥasan Aghā who obtains enormous wealth in return for his fatigue and service on behalf of the Egyptian world. For his easy circumstances are due to many ignorant folk who are in a worse state than beasts of burden since there is no value in life or health among them. But it is a pity that Ḥasan Aghā is to-day (June, 1894) engaged in prison, since the Government arrested him and the hand of Justice took revenge on him for killing one of the patients in his agency. Do not ask about what grief the people of those parts had when they suffered their famous "surgeon." We wish the excellent Aghā, aforementioned, a good life in penal servitude at Ṭurra[1] and we hope that Allah will inspire his devotees with intellect to guide them aright thereby, when the calamities of diseases afflict them.

XXVI

THE INJECTION WITH "THE BITTER TOY"

For long we have heard from people about extravagances in the matter of injection, and that it produces fat in those who are lean and slender. When we asked certain people as to the composition of the substances entering into the injection they answered that that was the knowledge of the womenfolk. [p. 44.] Allah decreed, however, that a certain woman of Cairo came to indicate to me one day what it did to her daughter who complained of the flow of blood with the feces and violent dysentery. So I asked her concerning the cause. She hesitated a little; then she said: I went to an "old wife" famous for injection in order that she might attend to my daughter because she was lean. She produced "*the Bitter Toy*" (*al-la'ba al-murra*) and boiled it in pig's grease for half an hour, and then placed it in a metal syringe, and bade me hold the

[1] [A well-known convict establishment near Cairo. Tr.]